

## **LCAC Residents Work on Farm, Produce Great Food and Feel Good About it.**

Looking out at the expansive field of crops, the writer sees a lone farmer. He is on his knees weeding. He continues down the row of plants, occasionally stopping to pluck a weed, examine a leaf or smell a plant. “He loves it out here. He’d sleep out here if we let him,” one of the correctional officers tells the writer.

Yes, this is a correctional facility: the Lawrence Correctional Alternative Center, or LCAC, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. And the “farmer” is resident Gaston Nault. Nault, along with Ryan Hughes and other residents, works the farm daily from June to October. The LCAC is the minimum-security male facility under the direction of Sheriff Frank G. Cousins, Jr. and the Essex County Sheriff’s Department.

Superintendent Joseph Furnari oversees the LCAC, which prepares its residents for release back to society. Allowing inmates to work while incarcerated is part of the rehabilitation that prepares them for release. Sheriff Cousins, Superintendent Furnari and the department staff realize that when an inmate works he or she feels good. Being productive increases self esteem, which can help residents upon their release.

Rich Bonanno of Pleasant Valley Gardens in Methuen provides support and expert advice to the farmers. The result is an abundance of fruits and vegetables. In addition to staples such as zucchini, lettuce, corn and tomatoes, the resident farmers grow crops that one might consider a bit more “upscale.” Certainly cantaloupe, celery and Cuban sweet peppers are not in most local fields.

The produce harvested here is used in a number of ways. According to Assistant Superintendent Frank Garrison, these fruits and vegetables are served not only at the LCAC, but also at the other two facilities run by the department: the medium-security facility in Middleton, and the Women In Transition (or WIT) minimum-security female facility in Salisbury. This provides fresh and healthy food for people incarcerated, while saving taxpayers money.

The produce is shared throughout the community. Each year between three and four thousand pumpkins are given to local schools, elderly housing facilities and other community projects. Local nonprofits such as Brothers in Need and Lazarus House receive some of the weekly harvests.

In addition to working on the farm, residents of the LCAC can be seen providing service throughout Essex County. Projects include working on the department’s graffiti-removal truck, cleaning and painting public buildings, helping to rehabilitate low income housing, maintaining public parks and open space and trash removal along roadways.



LCAC Residents Gaston Nault (left) and Ryan Hughes take a break from tending to the vast crops at the Lawrence Correctional Alternative Center.